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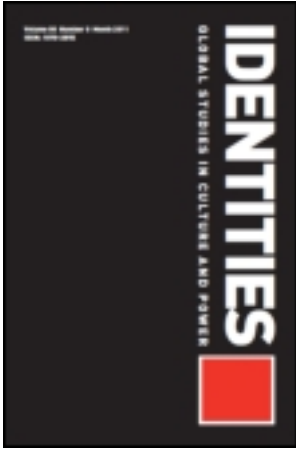
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Imagining a future in 'bush': migration aspirations at times of crisis in Anglophone Cameroon

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Imagining a future in ‘bush’: migration aspirations at times of crisis in Anglophone Cameroon

Maybritt Jill Alpes

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This article addresses the migration aspirations of young, lower middle-class Cameroonians living in Anglophone Cameroon. Deportations and prevention campaigns portray the negatives of migration, yet often have little impact because they assume that migrants’ aspirations are grounded in the prior success of other migrants. This research takes its lead from the question: Why aren’t aspiring migrants in Cameroon discouraged by migration failure? It is based on an ethnographic fieldwork conducted between September 2007 and January 2009 in Buea (South West Cameroon). Since the late 1990s, the desire for a future ‘away from home’ has come to be expressed in Anglophone Cameroon by aspirations of going to ‘bush’. Taking seriously people’s conceptions of success and failure in places of departure, the article argues that locally voiced claims of ‘global belonging’ exert an important influence on migration aspirations. An understanding of deeply rooted migration desires must include an analysis of identity politics.

Keywords: bushfaling; Cameroon; migration prevention; deportation; belonging

In the course of a minor dispute over his car’s paperwork, a migrant on a visit to Cameroon was shot dead by the police. ‘They shot a real bushfaller! Not even a normal man like me, but a real bushfaller!’ In Anglophone Cameroon, migrants who have been to the ‘Western’ world are referred to as ‘bushfallers’. The surprise and shock that Delphine and her friends expressed was not related to the abuse of police power, but to the consequences that the death of a bushfaller would have on his family. A bushfaller’s life has more worth than that of ‘normal’ people. The expectations and hopes of the entire family are projected onto the family member who is in bush. So what happens to migration aspirations in the place of departure if a migrant is deported back to his or her place of origin?

When studying people’s ambitions about (transcontinental) mobility in Cameroon, I was struck by how many of the aspiring migrants in Cameroon never leave the country at all. In a small survey of 100 respondents that I conducted in my fieldwork town Buea, 80 said that they would like to travel out of the country and 29% had actually made concrete efforts to go abroad.¹ Despite high migration aspirations, only 5% of all the respondents had actually been able to leave Cameroon. Among the aspiring migrants, the experience of having tried, but failed,

to leave is extremely common. After one and a half years of fieldwork among aspiring migrants, my research assistant Delphine was the only person who had been able to actually travel out of Cameroon.

As young Cameroonians dream of migration and their families keep raising the money to pay migration brokers, deportation is, at the same time, becoming an increasingly real possibility. In my survey, 75% of all the respondents had a member of their family abroad and 9% declared that they had a family member who had been repatriated to Cameroon. Despite the very clear presence of deportation, migration remained popular. My informant Manuella, for example, was deported after living for four years in Switzerland. Despite her personal experience of deportation, both she and her family members' migration aspirations did not change.

In this article, I take Manuella's experiences before, and after, deportation as a case in point to place notions of success and failure within a moral economy of departure. The concern shown by many scholars of migration studies about the illegality, smuggling and trafficking issues has, for a long time, overshadowed the choices, motivations and difficulties facing aspiring migrants in their country of departure. This article seeks to shed light on the experiences of aspiring migrants who remain in, or who are returned to, their country of birth. As a consequence, it incorporates the experiences of immobility and failed emigration attempts into the study of migration and, in doing so, takes the paradoxes between mobility and closure as its starting point.

This article frames international migration from Cameroon within the theoretical debates on the abjection and disconnection of Africa, inspired by Ferguson (2006), and the debates on the global dialectics of flow and closure (Geschiere and Meyer 1998). Ferguson draws on the term abjection to describe the contemporary African predicament which he characterises as a combination of being aware of global flows and modern progress with, at the same time, an increasing social, economic and geographic disconnection from it. As opposed to exclusion, abjection implies 'being thrown aside, expelled, or discarded' (Ferguson 1999, p. 236). To feel abjected thus refers to an acute sense of *disconnection*, i.e. a loss of a prior connection.

While globalisation hails connectedness as an ideology, the current era is simultaneously marked by constant efforts towards closure (Geschiere and Meyer 1998, p. 614). Deportations are acts of exclusion that disconnect people from territories and the social ties they have in these places. Not unrelated to contemporary restrictions in migration regimes, Cameroonians have come to express their sense of their place in the world through the term 'closure' and their aspirations for migration in terms of a search for 'connections'. Nyer has interpreted the resistance to deportation as 'abject cosmopolitanism', i.e. political acts that seek to challenge the terms on which identity and community are currently defined (2003). This article analyses migration aspirations in light of people's experiences of abjection in the global South.

I will argue in this article that failure to leave the country and deportation do not discourage others from wanting to migrate, because migration aspirations are based on locally grounded notions of failure, and a comparison of the alternative routes of achieving success in the places of departure. High degrees of involuntary transcontinental immobility reinforce rather than reduce the value of international connections and thereby increase the attractiveness of migration. By considering moral economies of belonging and membership (Drotbohm 2011), we can also begin to understand the current feverish pursuit of migration by many young West Africans as a project centred on locating home within the global. Migration aspirations in the face of adversity are also a political project to establish claims to global belonging.

I base my demonstration on 14 months of fieldwork conducted between 2007 and 2010 in the university town of Buea which is the provincial capital of the South West Province in Anglophone Cameroon. Over the last 100 years, the South West Province has seen massive flows of immigration from what is now termed the North West Province Ardener *et al.* (1960), Konings (1995, 1996), Ngoh (1996) and Nkwi and Warnier (1982). As a consequence, most of the informants and their families considered themselves to be strangers in the place they lived (Konings 2001). While many Cameroonians feel betrayed by the current political regime, Anglophone Cameroonians, in particular, often believe that there is little prospect of them ever becoming 'proper' citizens (Fokwang 2006, p. 84). As a city, Buea currently owes its size and dynamic character to the university which was constructed there in the early 1990s. Although all the informants with whom I worked remain tied to their villages of origin, either in the South or North West Province, this study is largely one of people's attitudes and levels of knowledge within an urban setting.² I worked predominantly with young people and their family members who belonged to what one might characterise as a lower middle class.³ All the interviews and conversations were conducted in Pidgin, the lingua franca of Anglophone Cameroon. In most of my research work, I was accompanied by my research assistant Delphine.

In this article, I will first of all set out why, and how, a study of the moral economy of departure can enable scholars to better understand migration aspirations on the terms of aspiring migrants themselves. Turning then to migration aspirations as they are manifest in contemporary Cameroon, the second section of this article will explore who, in particular, in Anglophone Cameroon aspires to migrate. By analysing how aspiring migrants come to understand the costs and gains of migration, this article relates migration aspirations to locally available alternatives for success and failure. By drawing on the case study of the deported migrant Manuella, the third section of this article examines issues of social status and identity formation and uses them to question the ideas in many countries of arrival in Europe about what constitutes migration failure. After her involuntary return to Cameroon, Manuella's daily practices, choices and social relations underscored both her gain in social status, and the identity issues at stake in the aspiring migrants' ongoing quest for renewed migration. In the last section, using

international telephones and numbers as a metaphor, I relate migration aspirations to Cameroonians' experience of their place in the world. By exploring the moral economy of departure in Anglophone Cameroon, this article places strong migration aspirations in relation to locally relevant notions of success and failure and thus unravels the membership assertions that underlie migration aspirations.

Moral economy of departure

Much research on transcontinental migration is conducted from the perspective of 'the migrant-receiving nation state' which is one that regards immigrants as 'outsiders coming in, presumably to stay' (De Genova 2002, p. 421). In this article, however, I study migration aspirations exclusively in relation to the economic and social contexts of departure which shape values and define what constitutes success and failure. Given the predominance of the focus on immigration in migration studies, a study of the moral economy of departure allows me to shift geographical perspective. With the 'moral economy of departure', I refer to the production and circulation of values, emotions and norms (Fassin 2009, p.1257), which are evoked by the context and event of departure.

Discussions on why people are ready to take risks to get to their desired destinations often assume that migration aspirations are motivated by the successful migratory behaviour of others or by already pre-existing migration networks (e.g. Boyd 1989, Massey *et al.* 1994). These analytical approaches to migration aspiration neglect the fact that crisis and social status can have different meanings in different contexts. Following the focus of this special issue – what do individuals imagine migration to be before they actually migrate? – this article explores the values, emotions and norms in a place of departure, such as Anglophone Cameroon.

Scholars within migration studies have elaborated on the notion of cultures of migration in which 'non-migrants observe migrants to whom they are socially connected and seek to emulate their migratory behaviour' (Kandel and Massey 2002). Scholars within this approach analyse 'those ideas, practices and cultural artefacts that reinforce the celebration of migration and migrants' (Ali 2007, p. 39). Building on these prior insights on culture and emulation, a study of moral economies of departure allows me to place the formation of migration aspirations into more historical, economic and political contexts. Migratory risks do not exist only because individuals and their family members choose to migrate. The willingness of aspiring migrants and their families to take risks and make sacrifices should also be related to the wider structural factors that also impose choices on individuals.

I also draw on the notion of the moral economy of departure to open up avenues for contrasting different kinds of moral economies. Media and policy debates in the countries of arrival, for example, often argue that people in West Africa would not migrate if they knew more about life in Europe. Implicit in this line of reasoning is both the presupposition that many migrants in Europe fail and the belief

that this failure would discourage others from wanting to migrate. A study of the moral economy of departure in Anglophone Cameroon allows us to relate the failure of some migrants to remain abroad to conceptions of success and failure within people's lives and migration trajectories in Cameroon itself.

Migration aspirations and meanings of failure

Migration risks have changed, but have not diminished people's migration aspirations (Sheridan 2009, Lucht 2011). By exploring the case of Manuella, I seek to demonstrate how notions of success and failure should be related to the prior migration and life trajectories of people in their places of departure.

Aspiring migrants at times of crisis: falling bush

Since the late 1990s, Anglophone Cameroonians have talked about transcontinental migration in terms of *bushfalling*. Literally speaking, to *fall bush* means to go hunting in the wilderness to chase down trophies to bring back home. Figuratively speaking, bushfalling is a metaphor expressing both the promise of migration, and the kind of determination and strength that it takes to weather the potential dangers along the way to gaining this wealth and success by migrating.

While mobility patterns between Cameroon and Europe have a long history (De Bruijn and Brinkman 2011), bushfalling is a very recent phenomenon. First of all, the emergence of bushfalling needs to be understood in relation to a hardening of immigration policies that *de facto* bar most Cameroonians from getting a visa to travel to the northern hemisphere. Furthermore, bushfalling emerged in relation to the structural adjustment programmes of the late 1980s and early 1990s and the devaluation of its country's currency, the CFA francs, in 1994 (Monga 1995, Konings 1996, Van de Walle 2001, p. 252). As a consequence, the real value of civil servant salaries was reduced by two thirds. Even today, one can still see unfinished buildings by the roadside – buildings whose construction had started before the crisis. Unemployment rates are high and education offers less and less guarantee of a stable income and a comfortable lifestyle. In autumn 2008, Cameroonians took media reports about the crisis lightly. After more than 10 years of continuously coping and struggling with an economic crisis, they had become accustomed to this 'routinized state of crisis' (Mbembe and Roitman 1995). Jokingly pointing at her long experience of successfully managing in an ongoing crisis situation, my neighbour expressed the hope that her family members abroad would finally take her more seriously and listen to her advice.

To want to fall bush by definition means to be willing to take risks, i.e. to go and try to be successful although others have been known to fail. Bushfalling is strongly associated with adventure and self-enrichment (Pelican and Tatah 2009, p. 232). Aspiring migrants and their family members in Cameroon are aware that the realities for migrants in Europe are difficult. As a consequence, bushfallers are expected to 'hustle'. 'Hustling' is a term used in Cameroon that refers to working

hard and accepting any possible type of work, or means of support, so as to be able to make money in bush. The term is at times also used more generally (i.e. not in relation to bush) when people talk about fighting to make a living and accepting any kind of work or means of support to try and be successful (Chernoff 2003). Yet, hustling abroad is associated with more success and greater prestige than just trying to make ends meet in Cameroon.

As pointed out above, access to bush remains extremely volatile. The most common failure in relation to migration is the failure to just be able to leave the country. In Cameroon, most emigration attempts to Europe take place via the airport and not overland. To be able to leave by plane, aspiring migrants commonly rely on the help of migration brokers who are disguised as NGOs and function as travel agencies (Alpes 2011). The favourite destinations of Anglophone Cameroonians are countries in Europe and the United States. As access routes to these countries are nearly all 'blocked', many aspiring migrants end up in China, Dubai or South Africa instead. These latter places are less prestigious, yet being able to leave Cameroon in, and of, itself is already a success.

Cameroonians have come to perceive the world as being closed off. As a consequence, the opportunities to travel by air are referred to in Cameroon as *lines*, *openings* and *programmes*. To travel is understood as overcoming closure and hence travelling requires the search for openings; the impossibility of travelling is thus a given at the very point of departure. Even if one has found an 'opening' or a 'line', actual departure is never certain. Openings and lines can close at any time. As a consequence, many young Africans and Cameroonians today experience their place in the world as having been abjected (Piot 2010, p. 77 and 94).

Despite the current 'routinized state of crisis' (Mbembe and Roitman 1995), not all social groups of Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians are equally attracted by the promise of bushfalling (Pelican 2012). How aspiring migrants evaluate the risks of migration depends on their social position and respective chances of success in Cameroon. For many of my informants, emigration constituted an attempt to integrate into a different class position in Cameroon by paying a broker to bring them to bush. I noticed that aspiring migrants from the lower middle classes were more willing to take the financial risk of giving money to migration brokers. Young Cameroonians from less privileged backgrounds often struggle to set themselves up professionally in Cameroon because they lack the kinds of social networks and connections with people in high places that have currently become crucial for employment in crisis-ridden Cameroon. Bushfalling here offers young Cameroonians from the lower middle classes a way of bypassing their social position in Cameroon by seeking to set up new connections with bush for their family.

As opportunities for success in Cameroon become limited, courtship practices have become an important resource for women. It is common in Cameroon – as in other African countries – to evaluate the seriousness of a boyfriend in terms of his potential to financially support the girlfriend. In the quest of money for their 'upkeep' (i.e. clothing, make up and visits to the hair salon), some women also like

to date married men, so called ‘sugar daddies’ (Nyamnjoh 2009). After her forced marriage in her teenage years, for example, Manuella managed to gain access to a hotel school with the help of money that she received from a boyfriend. When after graduation, Manuella was forced to accept a traineeship without pay in a hotel in Douala, she survived with the help of a married man who paid her rent, medical visits and outings. If this man had been in a position to marry her, Manuella might not have insisted on imagining a future in bush:

‘I thought I should better risk going rather than staying here because the guy who was helping me was a married guy; we had no future together. He didn’t want me to go, but I thought we won’t live together for a long time you know. This relationship must end one day and if it ends how do I live, how do I continue my life?’

Manuella managed to persuade her brothers to pay the remainder of her migration broker fee after saving a lot of the money that her boyfriend in Douala had given her. When deciding to fall bush, Manuella – like many other Cameroonians – could not conceive of any alternative investments in Cameroon that could yield the same benefits as bush. When she arrived back in Cameroon after being deported, she immediately prepared to go back to bush again. During the time that she spent (involuntarily) back in Douala, she refused to work in the hotel business for which she had been trained:

‘You work an entire month and at the end of the day’, she shared with me, ‘you only have 30,000 CFA francs [roughly 50 Euros]’. For such a small amount of money, it is not worth the effort. The monthly rent for a studio in Douala alone would cost about 30,000 CFA francs, i.e. the equivalent of a month’s salary.

Details about Manuella’s forced marriage in her place of birth and the economic alternatives for her to work in Cameroon are aspects that remain largely invisible to the spectator in Europe. To pay greater attention to such socio-economic factors, within the context of departure, also illuminates the limits in the range of choices available to young Cameroonians with aspirations for wealth and well-being.

The costs and gains of migration in a place of departure

An intimate understanding of how the costs and gains of migration are understood and experienced in Cameroon can help us to uncover the rationality that leads to strong aspirations for migration. First, migration costs lower if one compares the meaning of a failed investment in bushfelling with alternative investments in Cameroon. When my research assistant transcribed the interviews of undocumented migrant women in Europe, for example, she had different interpretations of what constituted a migration failure. When I expressed my concerns about the dangers incurred by undocumented informants and their struggles to live and work without papers, Delphine would instead admire them for being abroad and for being able to send 30 or 50 Euros every few months, or an occasional 300 or

400 Euros for a funeral. The label of illegality for her did not mean that she would evaluate a trajectory as a failure. Whether a bushfaller has a work permit or a residence permit or not, his or her migration trajectory can still elevate the social status of the family back in Cameroon.

Second, the uncertainty of migration investments is also lower if measured against the potential gains of bushfalling as experienced and understood by family members in Cameroon. Leaving for bush at all costs is considered to be an access route to success in a context in which everyday life has come to be defined by a 'routinised state of crisis' (Mbembe and Roitman 1995). Given that immobility constitutes the baseline uncertainty of every day life, migration, despite its uncertainties, is seen as an opportunity.

Finally, the gains of migration have to be reconsidered. Access to bush can represent a source of protection from other risks and costs of life in Cameroon. Many of my informants considered that bushfalling – unlike any other investment project – held the potential to generate future gains that could ensure the education and future projects of other family members. Although an individual migrant has to make sacrifices trying to make a living in bush, these sacrifices are legitimate and desirable from the perspective that migration contributes to the well-being of the entire family.

In Anglophone Cameroon, the most common migratory failure is not – as assumed by migration policy – the failure to attain legal status and financial security abroad, but the failure to leave the country in the first place. Hence, anyone who has managed to go abroad is potentially already considered a success, regardless of his or her actual situation in their country of arrival. For some sections of the Anglophone society, the opportunities to gain financial security and social recognition are so few that failure is almost a pre-given. In this context, the potential for failure in migration seems less likely and relevant to people's aspirations than the everyday experience of the restricted choices in Cameroon.

Migration aspirations and meanings of success

Migration aspirations are not always exclusively material (Fischer *et al.* 1997). On a deeper level, the cultures of material success and Western models of consumerism which are espoused by Cameroonian migrants (De Rosny 2002, Jua 2003, Fleischer 2012) also express membership claims. Citing Manuella's case, I will argue that the emergence of migration in the form of bushfalling stems, among other things, from the tensions between aspirations for global belonging (Ferguson 2006, pp. 192–193) and their meagre potential for fulfilment.⁴ Manuella was deported after four years in Switzerland. Although her cousin, and my research assistant, knew about Manuella's involuntary return to Cameroon, they nevertheless continued to want to migrate out of the country at all costs.

The few scholars examining deportation from the perspective of the receiving countries (i.e. former home countries) have found, in very different contexts, that deportees tend to struggle to successfully integrate and adjust to the place they

have been deported to, and that most intend to return to the place they had formerly lived (Zilberg 2004, Peutz 2006, Coutin 2007, Brotherton 2008, Hagan *et al.* 2008, Galvin 2012).⁵ How deportees are able to manage their forced return, as well as their claims of belonging depends, among other things, on the legal and social profile of the individual deportee, and on the historical connections and situation of the respective countries they are deported from and to.

The value of an international connection

After Manuella's deportation to Cameroon, I was surprised to discover how much people continued to admire Manuella for her worldly demeanour. After a night out together in Douala, a male friend of mine commented: 'She is a woman of the world – a very refined somebody. The kind of person a man would like to go out with'. The male friend did not know that Manuella had been deported. When asked by outsiders, or more distant members of her family, Manuella said that she had come back to Cameroon for marriage. Despite her deportation, Manuella thus maintained the status of a bushfaller.

Manuella was always careful to maintain her 'level' and to make her connections visible. In a context of departure that is characterised by high degrees of involuntary immobility, international connections can yield great powers. When Manuella and I went second-hand shopping at the market in Douala and a salesman annoyed us with his bargaining strategies, Manuella responded: 'I've been inside an H&M'. The salesman had not been inside a Hennes & Mauritz store. By making it clear that she had been to bush, Manuella was able to put an end to the aggression of the salesman at the market.

A few weeks after her deportation, Manuella's Nigerian boyfriend in Switzerland stopped phoning. A few weeks later, Manuella told me about a new boyfriend she had recently met in Douala. Her new man was married and, according to her, 'gentle and generous'. He often took her out dancing and, at regular intervals, gave her money to buy new clothes. The money, outings and trips that he offered Manuella made it easier for her to camouflage the reasons for her return.

When arguing with her boyfriend in Douala, Manuella explained to me that she would never allow this man to treat her like any other Cameroonian girl. Her connections to bush meant that she was now on a different 'level'. 'Ok, maybe I didn't have papers, but I've been out there. I've seen some things'. Manuella and her Cameroonian man never discussed the exact reasons for her return. He only knew that Manuella had lived for many years in Switzerland and he respected her for that. Even though Manuella's return had been involuntary, her international connections continued to confer a higher social status on her.⁶

Manuella used material goods to prove and demonstrate her international connections and thus her social status. Instead of the cheap chewing gum that one can buy everywhere on the street for a mere 100 CFA francs, Manuella insisted on buying chewing gum from the bakery. Foreign brands confer status (Monga 2000, p. 201). As Manuella would smile and point out to me, 'it is a gum that makes you

feel fresh again'. Freshness is precisely what is associated with bush. Informants would assure me time and again that staying in bush makes people 'fresh' and, by extension, their skin a little 'lighter'.

Currently, bush is a standard against which the value of things is measured.⁷ Goods from Europe or Northern America (even second-hand ones) are valued more highly because they have been sent from abroad (cf. Gardner 1993). When clothes-shopping Anglophone, Cameroonians make a constant distinction between *chinoiserie* and *okrika*. *Chinoiserie* is the derogatory term for the cheap and poor-quality products from China. *Okrika* refers to second-hand clothes sent from Europe. Even used clothes from Europe offer better quality and a higher status than products from China (Séraphin 2000, pp. 89–90). Manuella always bought *okrika*.

Money that comes from bush, too, is valued in a different way to money that has been earned in Cameroon. When my research assistant Delphine received money from a former boyfriend of hers in bush, for example, she shared some of the money with me and we went on a festive outing shopping for clothes. Without these international connections, Delphine would not have had the social status or financial power to grant me such a gift. At times of economic crisis and involuntary immobility, having international connections is an important way of increasing one's social standing in society.

International connections have such great value in contemporary Cameroon that they have not just become a means to migration but have, in themselves, become an important end of migration aspirations. In the almost complete absence of any effective social security provisions of the Cameroonian state, international connections can offer a source of social protection. Often Cameroonians in Cameroon are only able to pay hospital bills and solve other financial emergencies because of the international connections that their family members maintain in bush.

Becoming an ajebotar through bush

After her deportation, Manuella moved into her brother's apartment in Douala. To make space, her brother and his wife had to move their bed into the hallway. Despite this, Manuella was not at ease. She complained about the bucket showers in the apartment, the lack of water to flush the toilet shocked her and she was horrified by the amount of fat in the food. She was no longer used to the way and style of the people in Cameroon. When her sister-in-law realised how Manuella struggled to hand-wash her clothes, she even saw this as a sign of achievement. 'Her level has changed. [. . .] Over there, machines do everything'. She told me that Manuella had become a little bit more of an *ajebotar*.

Ajebotar is a Nigerian Pidgin term that has travelled to Cameroon via the Nigerian movies broadcast on the South African T.V. channel *Africa Magic*. The term refers to the luxuries and comforts that only members of the upper middle class in West Africa can afford. Manuella's life was driven by the daily struggle

to maintain her new class position. She did so by trying to maintain the highest degree of ‘*bush-ness-like*’ behaviour within the territory of Cameroon that she could. When Manuella ran out of credit one evening when she was on the phone, she was deeply ashamed. Bushfallers do not run out of credit. Her status as a bush-faller required constant hard work to maintain. Afraid of not being sufficiently camouflaged, she made sure she always had enough credit on her phone.

In part, her efforts to set up a new life in Douala were guided directly by her attempt and need to distance herself from the village life. People in the village – also called the *black bush* – recognised the privileges and luxuries of life in the city as symbols of bush. In this sense, her increase in status was real and not merely a question of perception management.

Manuella’s sister-in-law, Beltha, took care of two children. When her husband forgot to leave any money before he went out at night, Manuella was able to give money to Beltha so that she could buy breakfast for the children. Unlike Beltha, Manuella was able to draw on savings that she had sent back as an emergency fund to her brothers during her time in Switzerland. Manuella not only had a greater degree of independence and greater status, but also her own savings.

Not all deported migrants are able to maintain their positive migrant identity upon their return. Deportees often have a difficult struggle to manage the shame of expulsion when they return to their supposed home country (Drotbohm 2011). At times, deportees find themselves stigmatised as criminals. At other times, their Western lifestyle can also be interpreted as a sign of contamination (Peutz 2006, Schuster and Majidi 2013). Whether deported migrants can keep the involuntary nature of their return a secret or not depends on the kinds of values and emotions that people in their places of arrival associate with deportation and mobility, as well as on family support and support networks in the sending and receiving countries.

Most deported informants in this research managed to maintain a certain degree of dignity with the help of other bushfallers who regularly sent back money or goods for sale. One female deported informant was able to survive by selling the beauty products that her younger brother sent her from the United States. It was only by having family connections abroad that other deported informants could pay their rent and endeavour to open small roadside businesses. The deportation of some family members makes the help of other members in bush even more necessary.

The above explanations go a long way towards explaining why both the possibility of deportation and the deportation itself do nothing to destroy or limit the attractiveness of bush (see also Dünwald 2012). The length of stay abroad, family connections (also to bush) and success in courtship practices, all determine whether or not deported migrants can safeguard the secret of the nature of, and the reason for, their return.

We have seen that narratives of return are carefully managed both to avoid shame, and to be able to keep drawing on the asset of having been bush and of being connected to bush. Bush is not only an important source of money supply,

but is also a source of value beyond the actual presence in bush. By rendering access to bush even more volatile, deportations reinforce the value of international connections even more. In Anglophone Cameroon, migration aspirations are grounded, to a large extent, in the value of global connections.

Migration and aspirations for global connectedness

International telephones and telephone numbers serve as a useful metaphor to illustrate global connections. When she was still in Cameroon, my research assistant Delphine told me: 'The first thing that I will buy for my mum when I'm in bush is a phone'. Delphine could have bought a mobile phone for her mother with the money that she was already earning as a research assistant, but the point was not the phone, but the place that it came from. 'She will be holding it and she will know that the phone has come from bush'. Her mother has not had formal education. She cannot read and write. She does not speak English. 'When she is in a meeting and she has a phone', Delphine explained, 'then her level will be seen as higher, because her phone will be from bush'.

In addition to phones from bush, international phone numbers are important status symbols, too. Having 0031 or 0044 numbers in your phone directory says something about the level of your connections and thus also about your place in the world. When Delphine finally made it to bush, she was rigorous about who had her Swedish mobile phone number or not. On the one hand, Delphine preferred only selected people to have her number as a simple means of protection from too many requests for money. People in Cameroon have high expectations of migrants and new technological opportunities for communication have only led to a rise in discontent, grudges and fights (Tazanu 2012).

On the other hand, this conscious management of international numbers can also be understood as a struggle over claims to global belonging. Citizenship is always based on inclusion and exclusion. For claims of belonging to maintain their value, access must be selective. Whilst I was on fieldwork in Cameroon, I was puzzled by how many times bushfallers changed their telephone numbers. No visiting bushfaller was ever in a position to pass on his or her telephone number to me. The standard explanation was always that when they got back to bush, they were planning to change their phone provider. What Ferguson has coined as a 'claim for equal rights of membership in a spectacularly unequal global society' (2006, p. 174), thus continues to play out in struggles over access to international telephone numbers in Cameroon today.

Access to global communication technologies has not replaced mobility aspirations, but has instead accentuated local experiences of immobility in Cameroon (Frei 2013). With a national passport that has little recognition on a global stage (and in this sense constitutes a hindrance to being granted a visa), the struggles over phones, the possession of international numbers and the receipt of calls from abroad all express claims to global membership. Telephone numbers identify the social status of a person in terms of his or her social network. In the absence of

geographical mobility, bush numbers can serve to identify Cameroonians as being, or not being, globally connected.

Conclusion

Migration prevention campaigns stress, above all, not only the difficulties of life in Europe and the dangers of illegality, but also the likelihood of deportation. Based on predominantly economic reasoning, European campaigns that seek to lower the migration aspirations of young Africans have not fallen on fertile ground in West Africa. The failure of these campaigns rests with the unexplored assumptions in the places of arrival about what constitutes a risk in today's world. This article has explored the migration aspirations of would-be migrants in a place of departure. I have drawn on concepts of success and failure, and on the dynamics of identity formations, to explain why the failure of some migrants to remain abroad does not decrease the migration aspirations of others.

A study of different moral economies of departure allows us to approach migration aspirations from the perspective of people in places of departure. This change of perspective allows us to ask what constitutes a risk in the first place. Cameroonians, for example, currently experience their place in the world as closed off. Failure is associated with having to stay in Cameroon, and consequently having connections to the outside world constitutes success in, and of, itself. Insights into these locally specific notions of success and failure can help to put into perspective explanatory approaches to migration aspirations based on remittance flows, legal status and formal citizenship rights.

In a context of imposed immobility for many on the continent, migration aspirations have become claims to global membership rather than just expressions of a desire to be geographically and socially mobile. The inaccessibility of visas and the possibility of deportations further heighten the value of global connections and thus strengthen, rather than decrease, people's migration aspirations. In contemporary Cameroon, for example, the failure of deported migrants to continue living abroad does not discourage aspiring migrants because they relate it to their own failure of not being able to leave the country in the first place. Despite her deportation, Manuella, for example, remained, in many ways, a worldly person able to overcome (even if only for a short while) the exclusions imposed on her by the current migration regime.

In reference to regimes of belonging, I return to the anecdote that opened this article – the bushfaller who was shot by the police. In Cameroon, the life of a migrant is worth more than the life of an ordinary Cameroonian because a migrant has been able to achieve worldliness. The value of the life of a 'big man' in Cameroon is also worth more than the value of an 'ordinary' man's life. Both have gained access to another level of belonging. Aspiring to migrate is thus not only a pursuit of illusions and dreams, but also a quest for status and global inclusion. Even if only in its deportable form, bushfalling, as a form of labour migration, is perceived to offer the promise of increasing the worth of one's life.

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Notes

1. These emigration attempts ranged from applying to foreign universities abroad for admission, to engaging in conversations with family members abroad and asking whether these relatives could 'bring them over'. The survey covered 50:50 men and women, as well as three different neighbourhoods of varying income groups.
2. In a survey conducted in the 1990s, Séraphin established that more than half of the questioned population in Douala would like to migrate or at least travel out of the country. In his survey, most of the individuals who would have liked to emigrate were young, had a higher level of education and were not yet heading a household (2000, pp. 200–201).
3. Most of my informants had school-leaving certificates or even university degrees, but sustained themselves on local salaries and did not fulfil the requirements to be eligible for visas at consulate offices.
4. For tensions between bushfalling and claims of autochthony, see Nyamnjoh (2011).
5. A large amount of the literature on post-deportation trajectories discusses deportees from the United States who have criminal convictions and who have lived most of their lives in the United States.
6. Despite the shame of expulsion and alleged criminality in the very different case of young Cape Verdean deportees, Drotbohm nevertheless observed similar dynamics to those that I described above and noted the positive aura of 'having been there' (2011, p. 393) and the positive consequences that this can at times have for the attractiveness of these young men among local women (ibid, p. 388).
7. For a more theoretical discussion of the dynamics of imitation, see Ferguson (2006, pp. 155–175).

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